

## Grand Opening of Iraqi Farmer Cooperative Marks Progress Toward Sustainability

November 2009

A farmer's cooperative in Iraq will celebrate the grand opening of its new office and warehouse facilities and the first meeting of its board of directors in December thanks to the guidance and advice of three USDA Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) agricultural advisors.



**USDA PRT Agricultural Advisors Floyd Wood, John Ellerman, and Glen Brown and Bruce Bailey, U.S. Agency for International Development, view the construction site for the new GMAAD office and warehouse.**

The not-for-profit cooperative—the Green Mada'in Association for Agricultural Development (GMAAD)—provides farmers in four townships in Mada'in Qada, which is east of Baghdad, with free technical assistance and training and access to low-interest lines of credit to purchase or rent agricultural equipment, supplies, such as seed and fertilizer, and services at lower costs. Membership in the cooperative is growing by 10 percent per month, with more than 800 members to date.

Supported by 47 agricultural associations in Mada'in Qada, the Iraq Ministry of Agriculture, and Iraq's Prime Minister, USDA PRT agricultural advisor Floyd Wood began guiding efforts to organize the cooperative in 2008. In 2009, two more USDA PRT agricultural advisors arrived in Iraq, John Ellerman and Glen Brown, and began working with Wood, who extended his one-year voluntary deployment a second year to see this project to fruition.

With initial funding of \$6 million from the U.S. Department of State to start the cooperative, followed by U.S. Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) funding to conduct reconstruction projects, contributions by members of the cooperative, and support and guidance from the PRT advisors, the cooperative has accomplished much.

Using \$2 million of the \$6 million received from State Department, the cooperative first established and trained its board of directors and staff members, constructed its facilities, and began operations. Then it began building drip irrigation systems and greenhouses in the region. It subsequently obtained CERP funding worth more than \$4.5 million to install nearly 600 drip irrigation systems and more than 400 greenhouses in Mada'in Qada.

These successes convinced farmers in Mada'in Qada that the cooperative was sustainable. As a result, more farmers began joining the cooperative.

With the remaining \$4 million in funds from State Department, the cooperative established a revolving credit system that is primarily being used to provide farmers with access to short-term credit. The cooperative is now receiving and processing credit applications, making it possible for farmers to purchase critically needed agricultural inputs and services at an especially important time of year—the fall plowing and planting season. Future projects in the works pending funding include construction of a poultry feed mill, cattle chutes, and a date-processing plant.

Having nearly reached its first year of operation, the cooperative is demonstrating to farmers that it is able to meet their needs. It is becoming a dynamic force in the development of modern agricultural practices in Mada'in Qada and a sustainable institution.